PED GRAMMAR IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FLs

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Abstract: Pedagogical Grammar has been notorious for a number of controversial issues, among them how necessary and effective it is in assisting foreign language learners at the moment of language production. If language is understood as a formal system that is activated when put to use and grammar as a meaning-negotiating resource, there are aspects of language that need to be taught if they are ever to be noticed and used in context. To teach these aspects, foreign language teachers typically resort to Pedagogical Grammar or other methods to provide learners with tools to create meaning and negotiate socially motivated communication. This paper addresses the relevance of Pedagogical Grammar to the teaching and learning of foreign languages, taking a theoretical approach. Ultimately, it is an attempt to further understanding of the topic and inspire practitioners to design pedagogical grammar activities. To this end, definitions of Pedagogical Grammar are reviewed, and related issues brought to light. Then, criteria for the design of pedagogical activities are highlighted.

Keywords: pedagogical grammar; foreign language learning; noticing; focus on form.

Introduction

Pedagogical Grammar or a grammar especially designed to aid learners of foreign languages in situated contexts involves grammatical analysis and description of the target language; grammatical theory; and the study of grammatical problems typical of learners of a given additional language or a combination of these approaches (DAVIES, 2007). In this paper, my purpose is to discuss the relevance of Pedagogical Grammar to the teaching and learning of foreign languages, taking a theoretical approach. Some of the questions I undertake include: What is Pedagogical Grammar and why is it relevant to foreign language learners (EFLers)? How can we design activities that purport to be 'pedagogical'? What criteria need to be met? What issues are involved?

To meet this purpose, I will discuss existing definitions of Pedagogical Grammar and focus specifically on English as a Foreign Language (EFL), my area of expertise. Then, I shall turn to the relevance of Pedagogical Grammar to those who consume it – the learners – and consider

possible issues. I hope the article may further understanding of the topic, inspire practitioners to consider designing pedagogical grammar activities tailored for their audience, and indirectly assist learners in their journeys toward language learning.

Ped Grammar: What is it?

There are many definitions for Ped Grammar (for a review, see KECK & KIM, 2014; LIVIA, 2006; ODLIN, 1994). According to Dirven (1990), pedagogical grammar is a "cover term for any learner or teacher-oriented description or presentation of foreign language rule complexes with the aim of promoting and guiding learning" (p.1). The focus is on how "grammatical items may be made more learnable or teachable by means of concrete, simple, non-technical, cumulative rules of thumb" (HAMMERLEY, 1982, p. 402).

Other attempts to define Ped Grammar have also included ways of providing language learners with tools to create meaning and negotiate socially motivated communication in context (CELCE-MURCIA, 1991; RUTHERFORD, 1987).   In Celce-Murcia's view, Ped Grammar should be seen as the rules of production, or a set of portable rules that can be useful for learners at the moment of language production. Taylor (2008) adds that "a pedagogical grammar will focus of necessity on learning problems, i.e., in the main, on what is 'idiosyncratic' or 'parochial' in a language, rather than on those aspects of general cross-linguistic validity" (pp. 38-39).

Compared to learners' grammar, Mahmoud (1996) describes Ped Grammar as knowledge that falls somewhere in between analyzed knowledge (rules that learners can describe informally in their own words) and metalinguistic knowledge (learners' ability to name categories and verbalize rules using grammarians' jargon). According to him, Ped Grammar reflects learners' understanding of how the language works without the extra burden of stating such functioning formally, in metalinguistic terms.   For pedagogical practice, this means minimizing the complexities of reference grammars and moving in the direction of learners' needs (e.g. KECK & KIM; LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003; LÍVIA, 2006; TAYLOR, 2008) and teaching the language, not about the language (GREENBAUM, 1987). The success of such a venture should be evaluated by the degree to which it promotes insights into and acquisition of the foreign language (TAYLOR, 2008).

Consequently, Ped Grammar is an area that requires both an interdisciplinary thrust and a close interaction between theory and practice. Teachers need to act as decision-makers (NASSAJI

& FOTOS, 2010), constantly running a needs analysis to decide what rule to teach, and when and how to make it teachable, depending on the learning goals, students' motivations, and contextual cues (ORTEGA, 2003).

Easy as that may seem, it involves many variables and demands both time and the ability to perceive what is necessary, a classroom goal that is highly desirable but not always achievable. In addition, grammar teaching is a highly complex process, and pedagogic recipes may be dangerous (LARSEN-FREEMAN, 2003) for two main reasons. First, teachers' beliefs tend to interfere and water down the recipe. Second, knowing a rule is not enough to guarantee that learners will retrieve and apply it at the moment of production.

However, retrieving and applying a rule at the moment of production may be achievable in varying degrees by different learners; and given the motivation that underlies grammatical rules, it seems worth trying:

> The basic point is that conventional usage almost always has conceptual motivation. Though it has to be learned, it represents a particular way of construing the situation described. With proper instruction, the learning of a usage is thus a matter of grasping the semantic 'spin' it imposes, a far more natural and enjoyable process than sheer memorization. The pedagogical challenge is then to determine the optimal means of leading students to this understanding (LANGACKER, 2008, p. 15).

But why should we attempt to create optimal means to lead learner to notice and understand a grammatical point? The tentative answer to this question is presented next.

Why is Ped Grammar relevant?

The relevance of Pedagogical Grammar rises from understandings that range from a definition of language to the role grammar plays in language processing, and ultimately in language learning. If we see language essentially as a formal system that is activated whenever put to use, and grammar as a meaning-negotiating tool, there are some unobservable properties of language that need to be taught if ever to be noticed (SCHMIDT, 1983, 2010). According to empirical studies conducted by Schmidt (1983) and Schmidt and Frota (1986), "people learn about the things that they attend to" (SCHMIDT, 2010, p. 2) or *notice.* This understanding, known as the Noticing Hypothesis, emphasizes the role of attention mechanisms and awareness in language

learning, a subject also addressed by many other researchers (LONG, 1996; RUTHERFORD, 1987; SHARWOOD SMITH, 1981).

Ellis and Robinson (2008) illustrate this argument by retaking Schmidt's (1983) paradigmatic case of Wes, a Japanese ESL learner who Schmidt taught in Hawaii. Even though Wes reached a high level of fluency in English and could act strategically to sell his paintings, his linguistic accuracy did not progress. After studying English for five years and being fully exposed to the language (he used to live in Hawaii), he would still use "-*ing*" in any context, present or past, among other things. As documented by Schmidt (2010, p. 3):

> After several years of exposure he continued to say things like *Yesterday I'm go beach* and *Tomorrow I'm go beach* (with no articles, no prepositions, and no tense marking), even though he surely heard people say things like I went to the beach yesterday, but apparently without registering the forms. In other cases, it seemed that he probably did notice grammatical forms in input and tried to figure them out, but his guesses were often inaccurate (SCHMIDT, 2010, p.3).

Schmidt (2010), in his analysis of the case, concludes that in addition to the communicative effort, some level of cognitive effort is a necessary condition for the successful learning of a language, especially in the case of adults. Ellis and Robinson (2008) also argue in this direction, claiming that implicit learning is not enough. That is, learners need to perceive which linguistic cues are at play and why (SCHMIDT, 2010); their attention mechanisms need to be directed to aspects of language that are present in the input. Only then can a mental representation of how the language works be formed, so that learning may ultimately take place (ELLIS & ROBINSON, 2008).

The argument about the importance of the Noticing Hypothesis may be further reinforced by the case of Schmidt's own learning of Portuguese in Brazil (SCHMIDT & FROTA, 1986). Although he learned Portuguese mostly by interacting with native speakers, "forms that were frequent in input were still not acquired until they were consciously noticed in the input" (p.4). Based on the study of Schmidt's own learning, Schmidt and Frota argue that if attention mechanisms are not activated, indirect correction during conversation or conversation-like discourse in classroom interactions may yield little effect, because learners are unaware of what is actually happening in terms of language use. In Schmidt's argument for the Noticing Hypothesis (2010), he defends that attention has a facilitative effect and that associated mechanisms such as

orientation, facilitation, inhibition, and alertness control information processing whenever necessary. This interpretation is also endorsed by Keck and Kim (2014):

> Such a view of the learning process helped to explain why many second language learners, exposed to authentic language input for many years, still did not fully develop their grammatical competence. A focus on meaning may lead to the noticing of key vocabulary words or formulaic expressions, but may not prompt learners to notice other, less salient features of the input, like grammatical morphemes or word order rules (KECK and KIM, 2014, p. 27).

Naturally, as Schmidt (2010) himself recognizes, the issue of whether learning requires attention is complex, controversial, and unsettled. There are many objections to the hypothesis (see SCHMIDT, 2010 for a thorough discussion of them), and variables such as cognitive styles may relate to it. However, this author sides with Logan, Taylor, and Etherton (1996), who claim that we learn about the things we attend to and learn much less about the things we do not attend to. Schmidt closes his argument pointing toward more reasons for than against aligning with the Noticing Hypothesis:

> Since many learners who rely on learning through interaction and exposure alone fail to come close to native-like norms of grammatical accuracy (as in Wes' case), there remains more than sufficient reason to hypothesize that individual differences in the degree to which learners pay attention to and notice grammatical features of the input may partly account for their relative success in this aspect of language learning (SCHMIDT, 2010, p.11).

Following Schmidt (2010), I argue here that the act of attending to or focusing on form potentially mediates *noticing,* if it occurs **intentionally**. In this sense, findings in the literature on form-focused instruction (DOUGHTY & WILLIAMS, 1998; IZUMI, 2003; MACKEY, 2006; SPADA & LIGHTBOWN, 2008) also provide further evidence for the Noticing Hypothesis. Some linguistic features may never emerge if not attended to, and others may fossilize (SPADA & LIGHTBOWN, 2008) if meaningful, contextualized focused-on-form practices do not mediate the emergence of the target features. Spada and Lightbown's account (2008) of existing research in form-focused instruction (FFI) further corroborates that "incidental learning allows students to acquire a great deal of language while focused on meaning in CLT and CBI" (p. 200). Both isolated lessons and integrated form-focused lessons in situated contexts seem to be useful for the acquisition of features that are difficult to perceive, may conflict with uses in the L1, or lead to communication breakdowns. Above all, FFI seems to function as a 'liberating force'

(WIDDOWSON, 1988) in the service of meaning and learners' autonomy; a resource to be drawn on whenever learners are deprived of context and in need of assistance. The issue then is how to afford the noticing of forms yet not noticed or in the process of developing (KIM & KECK, 2014).

Among the different proposals for how to do it figure the controversy between explicit and implicit instruction. According to Kim and Keck (2014), both have the potential to promote acquisition (see also NASSAJI & FOTOS, 2010) and should constitute a continuum where isolated explicit instruction may show on one end and pure focus on meaning may show on the other. In between, explicit instruction, in some sort of combination with collaborative tasks or implicit learning, may be prompted and followed by some sort of planned feedback in oral or written communication. Most of all, the *how* should be guided by the context of interaction and learners' needs.

If form-function mappings and perception of how the target language functions could fully explain how a foreign language is learned, all learners would reach proficiency just by engaging in meaningful interactions mediated by the additional language (ELLIS & ROBINSON, 2008). However, this is not what research and experience show. As the reviewed research has pointed out and many teachers of foreign language may attest, there are aspects of use that will not be inductively perceived even with ample learning opportunities. That is, a linguistic rule will not necessarily be available for use at the moment of language production. Pedagogical Grammar, thus, has a role to play.

Explicit instruction about rules of production (CELCE-MURCIA, 1991) or Pedagogical Grammar may accelerate the rate of language learning. This does not exclude the necessity of situated exposure to the target language in collaborative, task-oriented practices. Without it, noticing will hardly occur. The more learners are exposed to form-function mappings, the higher the probability that they will implicitly notice how the target language works (ELLIS, 2004; VAN PATTEN ET AL., 2004). Therefore, I agree with Taylor's assertion (2008) that "pedagogical grammar cannot easily be dispensed with. At the very least, pedagogical grammar may be conducive to what Schmidt calls noticing" (p. 82), and should be taught while taking into account variables such as learners' age and purpose for learning the language. This being said, the discussion should now move to ways of achieving this purpose.

How to teach grammar pedagogically: Designing materials

The way Ped Grammar is presented will depend on our philosophy of language and learning, and on the way we see grammar. If we see language as both a sociocultural and psycho-cognitive phenomenon, and grammar as a meaningful communicative system, materials designed to teach grammar pedagogically will include both communicative and cognitive oriented activities (KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012; NEWBY, 2015). This approach goes hand in hand with experiential and sociocognitive models of language learning, in which "language is learned from participatory experience of processing input and producing language during interaction in social contexts where individually desired non-linguistic outcomes (a bank transfer, another cup of milk) are goals to be achieved (or not) by communicating intentions, concepts and meaning with others" (ROBINSON & ELLIS, 2008, p.490). From this perspective, Ped Grammar should arguably be task-oriented and carried out as learners use language to do things with words. In this process, they draw on attention mechanisms and memory (MCWHINNEY, 1999; TALMY, 2000; TOMASELLO, 2003), transforming cognition into a mirror of sociocultural and linguistic experiences. The higher the frequency of the target construction, the faster its processing, automatic recognition, and retrieval will be, and the higher the probability that learners will generalize and abstract over the instances of the rule, so that the construction may become available for future use in other contexts (see ROBINSON & ELLIS, 2008).

Activities that aim at teaching Ped Grammar within this philosophy generally combine pragmatic, discourse-linked, context-based tasks with form-focused instruction while learners socialize and collaborate. In addition, they bear some relation to learners' psychological reality, interests, and specific goal in learning the language. "A task, then, is not simply any classroom activity, but rather must be designed in such a way as to create opportunities for students to experience form-meaning connections." Although combining pragmatic, discourse-linked, context-based tasks with form-focused instruction may be too ambitious, it is worth working for it, given its potential to accelerate language learning. To reach it, activities designed to teach Ped Grammar should, to some degree, afford negotiation of meaning and emerge from usage-based models; prompt learners to solve some sort of a communication problem; relate to learners' psychological reality; afford noticing or learning opportunities along the explicit-implicit continuum; and provide rules and reasons for a given usage, as well as opportunities for their retrieval and application in different contexts.

Pedagogical rules: Criteria and issues

In terming a rule 'pedagogical' we assume it is "concrete, simple, non-technical, cumulative, close to popular/traditional notions and in rule-of-thumb form" (HAMMERLY, 1982, p. 402). Similar to all other aspects related to Pedagogical Grammar, these criteria are also controversial (KIM & KECK, 2014; KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012; LIVIA, 2006) and fully complying with them is practically impossible.

Simplicity, in Livia's (2006, p. 96) terms, refers to the way a rule is constructed. To be simple a rule needs to be clear and concrete, leave out excessive details, and be easy to understand, remember, and apply. In doing so, the rule makes "learners feel they can understand and control even difficult grammatical areas". In other words, to be simple a rule should be psychologically valuable and make learners feel successful. The issue is that what may be simple and concrete for one learner may be complex and abstract for another, since both concepts involve perception (see WESTNEY, 1994), a cognitive variable that varies between learners and relates directly to their internal variables and experiences. Judgement calls will always be necessary, both by teachers (based on their beliefs, experience, and knowledge of grammar) and learners (based on their needs, age, proficiency, situation, cognitive styles, and other internal and external variables).

In addition, oversimplifications may also ruin the objective of teaching a rule pedagogically by stating half-truths, distorting language usage, and drawing on unscientific terminology (LIVIA, 2006). So, how much can we simplify without distorting a rule? By the same token, "the truth is of no value if it cannot be understood" (SWAN, 1994, p. 49) and used. Therefore, the effort to create pedagogical rules would benefit from satisfying, *to some possible degree,* demands that come together to characterize it as simple, namely, accuracy, usability, concreteness and capacity to be gradually integrated into language use in a given context (UR, 1996).

With regard to terminology, Hammerly (1982) recommends the use of non-technical words, but he also recommends meeting the needs of learners, which vary from context to context. That is, terminology is also a fuzzy concept, given that it should be graded to learners' level and psychological reality. Król-Markefka (2012), in her analysis of nine publications geared at providing intermediate and upper-intermediate learners of English with pedagogical rules for using definite and indefinite articles found that the materials generally formulated clear

and simple rules, although the use of some technical terminology (*noun phrase, determiner, countability*) seemed practically inevitable. She hypothesized that moderation may be the key, and similar to Ur (1996) and Swan (1994), she claimed that the choice of terminology should not impact the understanding and application of pedagogical rules. Król-Markefka further claimed that in the case of definiteness and indefiniteness, descriptive synonyms to explain the concepts are hard to be found or require the use of circular explanations and examples.

Other criteria expected to be fulfilled by a pedagogical rule, according to the literature, include *predictivity and discriminatory power*; *consistency and cumulativeness*; and *memorability* (HAMMERLY, 1982; KECK AND KIM, 2014; KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012; LIVIA, 2006). *Predictivity* seems to represent the liberating force Widdowson (1988) referred to, as it empowers learners to productively apply a rule to novel contexts. In addition, predictivity goes hand in hand with the rule's discriminatory power, given that if a rule assists learners in their prediction of when, where, and how to apply it, the rule can also assist them in *discriminating* when to use one construction and not the other. Again, both predictivity and discriminatory power are a matter of degree, and will vary according to learners' perception of contextual cues. Król-Markefka's analysis (2012) of pedagogical rules to teach articles in English indicated that these criteria lacked validity

Consistency and cumulativeness relate to the coherent and gradual buildup of a rule's basic-more general version (for initial stages) and its more fine-grained, specific distinctions (for more advance levels). The different versions normally serve the purpose of meeting learners' needs, at their various proficiency levels, and are cyclically taught from initial to advanced levels. To be consistent and cumulative, these versions should hold together as a whole and adhere to the same principles, in each successive addition. They cannot contradict what has been learned previously, at earlier stages. In the case of article usage, the pedagogical grammars analyzed by Król-Markefka (2012) were generally consistent in explaining exceptions to the rule and justifying their usage, given the complexity of article use in English. However, they were not cumulative in some of the cases she analyzed.

The last criterion to be considered in the design of pedagogical rules is *memorability*, the quality of being easy to remember. Because it relates to all other criteria that contribute to qualifying a rule as 'pedagogical,' memorability tends to increase as simplicity, clarity, truthfulness, predictivity, productivity, consistency and cumulativeness increase and

reciprocally influence each other. However, oversimplifications tend to be easy to remember and do not always correspond to the truth, as was the case with article usage formulations reported by Król-Markefka (2012). Król-Markefka (2007, cited in KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012) illustrates the negative effects of oversimplifications and their interaction with memorability. The author draws on a rule often recited by learners when referring to the usage of articles in ESL: "Use 'a' before singular and use no article before plural nouns." The rule, although clear, simple, and easy to remember and retrieve, puts accuracy at stake, given that "the" can be used before plural nouns, not to mention other idiosyncrasies that characterize the use of the (in)definite article. At the same time, the inclusion of detailed information would diminish the memorability of the rule (see KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012, for a comprehensive discussion of pedagogical rules of article usage in English):

> "the rules – perhaps inevitably – have certain weaknesses, which may make them fallible. These include: 1) lack of consistency, which is confusing and hinders meaningful learning; 2) numerous "uses" and exceptions, which makes the rules less memorable; 3) lack of unity and meaningful justifications, which makes the rules and their functions not so easy to understand; in consequence, the learners cannot make their own contextually-dependent decisions when using articles" (Król-Markefka, 2012, p.105-106).

Conclusion

The concept of a 'Pedagogical' rule is then a very "slippery concept" (LITTLE, 1994, p. 99), given that it is arguably geared to meet the needs of learners, and learners' variables change from context to context. In addition, all the criteria that serve as a basis to characterize a rule as 'pedagogical' consist of gradable concepts directly related to learners' perception. The concept of a significant rule itself is gradable. It is significant to the point that it is applicable to general situations (WESTNEY, 1994), and the ability to apply it to varying contexts depends on individual factors that range from cognitive styles to the capacity to abstract. Therefore, these criteria are questionable and, at best, they should work as a framework of reference, not as a zero-sum game (KRÓL-MARKEFKA, 2012; LIVIA, 2006; UR, 1996). An inventive approach

and caution are welcome when we analyze, create, or use a 'pedagogical' rule for a specific purpose.

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